

LITERARY CRITIQUE OF A TRIP TO ROME

(By C. A. ALLISON)

Literary critics arrogate to themselves an air of infallibility in matters literary, which becomes ridiculous in the light of the silly things which their greatness permits, or perhaps compels them to say. The silken wrinkles in their conceit doubtless need to be removed by the use of a little hot iron-rod, and a little merriment at their expense should be a delicious morsel to the awe-stricken reader. Let each reader judge for himself what is excellent in a book, and what constitutes a good book. I shall offer my estimate of Dr. Wilson's book but urge others to form independent judgments.

I confess a partiality for the ponderous and involved sentences of Milton and Maeterlinck, but admit that the clear periods of Dr. Wilson's are in better style. Such is their lucidity, that one forgets to notice how his words are constructed.

"Down the bay we drift, past great liners, fruit laden from the sunny South; past returning sloops and smacks, weighted with the funny tribe, past great sails from India's spicy coast; past gay excursion parties, returning from a well-spent day among Nature's wilds; past ocean greyhounds burdened with human freight, both from arctic and tropic climes, on down past the great forts, past Sandy Hook, then out into the wide offing."

Here is a long sentence, consisting of many parts, yet all so happily arranged as to give a sense of perfect harmony like the figures and tracery of a great church window. Time cannot be taken to note all the beauties of this quotation; but the words have a swing like the progress of the ship on which he rode, the diction is strikingly apt, and the rhythm of the successive phrases is like the powerful throb of the engines. The dots indicate the omission of a superfluous word.

"The great ship turns her prow eastward, and sets all her mighty machinery in motion, throbbing, pulsating, straining, she cleaves and fairly seems to lift herself through the white fringed billows."

Here is a piece of language engineering that has seldom been equaled for descriptive and dynamic beauty. If dug painfully from some dead language, it would undoubtedly be so considered.

"I range feeling, one expression

in the darkness of the the cutting through the snowy banners of the inky waves, the sky and stars a millions miles above you, ten-thousand feet of brine below, and only a plank between you and eternity, for though mighty and powerful the ship may seem, commanding our pride and awe, it is now, with its freight of merchandise and souls, but a speck upon the face of immensity. What a sense of littleness comes over us in such an hour."

Here is the brush work of a master artist, an exercise of profound understanding. Again I use dots to indicate the omission of words, which, from my hypercritical viewpoint, are superfluous. I know something of four languages, and find barbarous words and expressions in all of them.

"Free, unconfined and unclaimed, the waves of the interminable ocean breathe their crisp smiles. Free and unchecked, Neptune's white hounds low loud o'er the bounding deep. The great sea is free to all, and in many ways is typical of humanity. Its listless chimes seem to breathe the sad undertone, the mournfulness, not only of ancient life, but also the heart sorrows of the world to-day. Its restless waves breathe the ever repeating disappointments which, unceasingly, are wearing out the lives of the toiling and despairing masses. Again it breaks the ever repeating disappointments, which, unceasingly, are wearing out the lives of the toiling and despairing masses. Again it breaks up the sealed fountains of our natures, and lifts the mind to thoughts as high and great as the jutting crags that beetle o'er its surge. It has its great undercurrents of discontent, its gulf streams of passion, its monsoons of violence, and like the apparently peaceful nations of men, no matter how smooth and peaceful its surface, war universal reigns in its depths below. There, too, the strong and powerful prey upon the weak and helpless, showing that in this respect mankind has not evolved far from the savage instincts of his sealy ancestors."

As a description and a comparison, this passage is fit to compare with any in literature. But as a statement of fact—No! a thousand times No! No one has felt more bitterly than myself the brutality and robbery of man, yet unlike the murderous world of the ocean, the deep sea of humanity has countless pearls of pity, and inestimable treasures of wisdom and of love. The statement is only a half truth, but we must not forget the terrible fact that it is half way true.

Space is too limited to show further with what beauty and scholarship he writes of the wonders of the ocean. But this is not merely a volume for perusal. It should be laid on the table with the Bible, the dictionary, and Shakespeare, and read often.

"And there's naught in the world so deep, O sea, Naught, naught, but a deathless love; Which giveth and lavisheth all like thee, And which cometh from above; Like thee, too, Love neither pauses nor sleeps, In its ever restless flow; And like thee, its secrets are buried in deeps No mortal can fathom or know."

There is a lyric sweetness in these verses, which he wrote about the ocean, a depth and purity of feeling, like Tennyson's beautiful lines about the sea. Nothing nobler could be carved upon his monument than this.

Dr. Wilson flourishes a versatile pen and he has a happy way of mingling the sublime with wholesome banter, his raillery is fine rather than professional. But I can not pardon his slang even if it is characteristically American.

Dr. Wilson gives us an entertaining and witty chapter about Shakespeare and his home at Stratford. His wit is subtle, adroit, spicy and mirthful.

His chapter on London is crammed with history and interesting facts. He gives a magnificent description of St. Paul's church, but condemns the pictures there, because, "Beside the cross and the Prince of Peace is seen the battle-axe and spear, and the deadly conquest. Here you see plainly depicted the meaning of the union of church and state." The description of Westminster Abbey is replete with scholarly information, and glitters with bright comments. He changed that sombre old repository of death into one long lively smile. The paragraphs concerning London's art gallery and the British Museum are fascinating and instructive.

Dr. Wilson's story or Paris is a flower garden and fruit orchard of beautiful and vivacious description. Names with which we have all been familiar from childhood drop from his pen with fresh interest, like newly polished coins of gold. His strictures on art, especially religious art, are too sweeping, but having been dosed with conventional absurdities by professional art critics, it is a delightful relaxation to meet a man of sufficient virility to have independent views.

"The painting of Millais is the most popular in the whole great collection. Every one wants to see 'The Gleaners,' and why? Why has it struck such a popular chord? Why do people pass the gods by in order to see 'The Gleaners'?" I will tell you, and it will prove all that I have said in my criticisms. 'The Gleaners' touch your heart strings which vibrate with human sympathy and sorrow at the sight of poor, old, useless women having to glean stray heads of wheat and then shell them out with their hands, in order to allay hunger. You sorrow that such conditions should exist in beautiful, pious England and France. Your own back grows weary, as you stand and look at their fixed, bent, silent figures."

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This is Dr. Wilson's estimate of the picture. The art judge would dilate on its magnificent technique, its effectiveness grouping and perspective. All these features appeal to me, but best of all is its sublime strength, sanity, and patience.

Injustice and antiquated aristocracy and ecclesiasticism are incisively stung with terrible persistency through the book. He mourns "the lingering degradation of priestly and kingly authority," but exults at "manhood and womanhood slowly rising out of it."

Although Dr. Wilson and myself are good friends, we fail to agree on religion. But Ingersoll was one of the sublimest preachers that ever lived, and I believe Dr. Wilson to be religious in the truest sense of the term. His book is a glittering escapade against economic injustice, a Japanese campaign against the strongholds of superstition, a tiny beam helping to herald the dawning day of the humanities.

His argument against war is new and forceful. His sympathy for the struggling masses of Germany is beautiful, but not altogether deserved. Parenthood is one of the noblest offices of man, but for men and women to produce children, where their helpless little lives must be toilsome, and starved, and miserable, is utter inhumanity. Far better the joys of the house of assiguation, than the sufferings of a family of little ones.

His beautiful and eloquent description of Switzerland must be read to be realized. His words are convincing, and as wholesome as the country of which he so graphically writes. Here is a description of the view from the top of Mount Pilatus:

"O, what a sight! what a sight!! Lucerne looking like a town plot in your geography. The steamers far below looking like small skiffs, green mountain sides fringing the blue lakes, us, entirely obscuring our view, only to pass away, and to permit a new burst of glory to strike on the sight, white frozen peaks all around, pierced the blue distance and stood like sentinels of chastity and truth over the warm, vacillating and passionate earth below."

"This brain of man has measured the distance of the great golden sun sloping to the west, and the myriad night worlds that pierce the corulean ether. I had seen him dip under the ocean, painting the skies with solid crimson, tinting the pearly clouds with rainbow glories, and streaking the dimpled surface of the sapphire sea with golden streaks of liquid fire. I had seen him rise up among the clouds of the morning, scattering his diamond rays over the lone and stately ship ploughing so majestically toward him, through his scintillant silver path. It was now my privilege to see him go down between the mountain tops, tinting their glistening snows with an ever varying crimson, which melting into glowing shades of pearl and purple softly, gently, dreamily faded into the drowsy dusk."

This, I believe to be the finest description of the sun and its beauties that I have ever read. Only by careful study can the golden ore of its art be dug from the depths of its mines. And in conclusion, his sublime cry of inspiration—O that gospel message is too grand to be given here.

Every American ought to read his criticisms of Americans. It is done in a generous but honest way. He speaks very interestingly of Socialism in Italy, and says that there, "The Anarchist and Socialist are only very mild Republicans." He says, "For myself, I think Socialism impracticable, and that philosophical Anarchy, so-called, is only a beautiful dream. Tolstoy is a humane crank. His ideals can not be realized as long as the negative evil and selfishness exist in human nature. We must have law and government, but as little of it as possible."

The descriptions of the vast cathedrals of Europe are wonderful. His pen is like the wand of an enchanter. He writes, "I was in the room of the late composer, Verdi, which contains all of his personal belongings. And this to me was a shrine. If there is any music in the world, which, more than another, inclines me to a belief in another life, it is Verdi's Miserere, from the opera of Trovatore. It does not seem to me music of this life. When I hear it, I stop all other thought, and as I listen, it seems to me that it is a voice, a soulful symphony of some departed love or friend, stealing out of the mysterious void, returning to the habitations of its old-time world affections."

Hush! is not that the voice of God, a sublime aspiration for a love infinitely better than we have known? Dr. Wilson has expressed some unique and masterful ideas about art. Certainly the courageous way in which he writes of art and sex is wholesome and highly commendable.

The chapters of the Free Thought Congress are worth the price of the book. They give the discourses of great philosophers and savants, and sprightly narrative.

The pages concerning Keats and Shelley, are beautiful and highly poetic. They are a flower garden clustering with finest words and most precious thoughts.

Dr. Wilson's poem called "The Forum," would, with its dazzling gems of thought and language, add lustre to any pen that ever struck its lightning of poetry into the world. He gives an entertaining description of Haecel, and his account of the murderer Constantine is a powerful word sculpture.

His picturing of the Catacombs at Rome is realistic as a series of grand steel engravings. The writer's sparkling wit in the midst of weird surroundings was an artistic mingling of the grotesque and the greswome. His talk about the picturesque city of Naples is as alluring as "Nasby in Exile."

This short account is wretchedly inadequate to do justice to "A Trip to Rome." It must not only be read, but studied. Although Dr. Wilson is known to me, I have tried not to underestimate it, nor to overestimate it. Dr. Wilson always receives adverse criticism in a generous spirit. But adverse criticism, not even my adverse criticism, is not necessarily good criticism.

In my estimation Dr. Wilson is a poet of the highest class. The fact that I delight in such fine masters as Tennyson, Keats, Browning, Lowell, and Shakespeare, is proof that my judgment is not valueless. He strikes a popular chord, but with all is an artist of lyric sweetness, exalted pathos, and gorgeous coloring.

The world is sick with too much worship of great men, men who by

the chance possession of brute strength of intellect have done extraordinary things. There is too much condescending and patronizing talk about "the common people." That is like extolling the dome of the Capitol at Washington, then offering some apology for the magnificent building upon which it rests. A bad thing about the common people is their enslavement to magniloquent names. Great men are necessary evils, and common men should insist on being treated with due respect. The main thing about Dr. Wilson is not his poetic genius nor his masterful prose, but his humanity and his devotion to the memory of his father and of his little girl. Not in high literary skill, but in the faithfulness of his heart, are the treasures of a man's life.

Comment by Dr. Wilson.

I greatly appreciate the above criticism by my friend Allison, with whom I radically differ in some views. I want to say here, that I am greatly indebted to him, for the assistance he rendered in translating for me much of the matter of my report on the Congress.

He took special interest in this, and the work he did was worth far more than the amount he asked for it. His generous criticism was unexpected by me, and since he has dwelt at length upon my pictures of the sea, my guilty conscience compels me to a confession. Quite a number here in Cincinnati have told me that my description of the sea in the first chapter is worth more than the price of the book, and that it surpasses Washington Irving's first impressions of the sea.

I wrote all that two days before I started on the trip, right here at my desk where I am now writing—I refer to that part describing my departure from New York on as far as the poem. "The Cradle and Grave of All," There was more of it which was printed in my first letter to the Blade, and which I cut out to make room for other matter. I read it to Mrs. Wilson before starting, and she said it wasn't honest to leave the impression that it was written on the sea. I told her that I knew it wasn't, but that the sainted Talmage went over to the South of France, and from there wrote a trip clear round the world, and I trusted the Lord would forgive me even as He had forgiven him, and hat some day, I would make public confession of my guilt.

I wrote my sea description just for the purpose of seeing how near my imagination could approach the reality, and I must say, that after actual experience, I could not improve upon it. I took out the manuscript and read it to several appreciative acquaintances, when four or five days out on the ocean, and they advised me to let it stand, as it could not be improved. I feel relieved now that I have told this, and squared myself with my conscience as well as with my wife.

In writing the book, I felt that I was getting off some things a little more sensible than I am given to saying, but I did not expect, and can now hardly believe all the good things my friends are saying about it. I didn't have a chance to write a book, I would like to do it over and have the leisure and quiet, I ought to have had, I am sure I could have done better. J. B. W.

SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENTS

By Herod Impossible if Josephus is Correct as to Time of Herod's death. More Light on the Subject.

(By E. LEWIS)

In the Blade of July 29, 1906, I read a very interesting editorial on the birth of Christ. I am not going to criticize the editorial, but would like a small space to give to the Blade readers an item of historical information which I think will be accepted by those who have the opportunity of looking into Josephus, which ought to settle the matter in regard to Herod's being dead or alive at the time of the supposed birth of Christ.

Some twenty years ago, I was reading Josephus antiquities of the Jews, Book 14, Chapter 14, and read this part of paragraph 6. But when the senate was dissolved. Antony and Caesar went out of the senate house with Herod between them, and with the Consuls and other Magistrates before them in order to offer sacrifice and to lay up their decrees in the capital. Antony also feasted Herod the first day of his reign. And thus did this man receive his kingdoms, having obtained it on the one hundred and eighty-fourth olympiad, when Cain's Donitius Valvinius was consul the second time and Cain's Asinius Pollio the first time.

Then I read in Wars of the Jews, book 1, Chapter 33, Paragraph 8.

So Herod having survived the slaughter of his sons five days died, having reigned thirty-four years since he had caused Antigonus to be slain, and obtained his kingdom but thirty-seven, since he had been made king by the Romans.

Now I naturally wanted to know how that corresponded with the statement of the writer of Matthew, that Herod is charged with the slaughter of the innocents. I meant at hand to learn when the Abynfnad occurred.

I wrote to Rabbi Adler, Chicago, and asked him to tell me what time in the history of the world the 184th Olympiad occurred, I simply stated that it was a point in history, I wished to locate. He very kindly answered that the 184th Olympiad occurred forty years before the Christian era began. In looking the matter up today, in a large dictionary, I find that the first Olympiad occurred 776 years before Christ. Now figure that every one that can, and learn that Herod was dead three years before Christ was born, and could not have ordered those children slaughtered or fear that his kingdom would be taken away from him.

776 B. C., deduct the 40 years. Multiply by 4, makes 184th Olympiad. I am thoroughly convinced that Herod was dead three years before the boy Jesus was born.

THE PAPER WITH THE MUZZLE ON

Will Daily Still Finds it Difficult to Get Recognition From His Local Papers Because of His Inefficiency and Turns to the Blade Again.

(By W. C. DALY)

W. C. Daly, of Huntingburg, after vainly trying to get some of the southern Indiana papers to publish his article in defense of atheism which we rejected, has finally had it published in the Blue Grass Blade, a notorious infidel paper published in Lexington, Ky., and he is mailing off copies of the paper containing his article to many of his friends in this place. Now we like Will Daly, and we regret seeing him make a fool of himself, and if he thinks to build up the cause of infidelity and atheism in this way he is badly fooled. Said a business man to whom he sent the paper: "I did think Bill Daly had some sense, but after reading that article of his in this infidel paper published in Lexington, after reading that article the only conclusion I can arrive at is, that he is losing his mind or is a d-d fool." We have yet to hear a favorable comment upon his views. Quit it, Will! You don't believe that you are advocating, and if you were brought down to death's door you would be calling upon that God, whom you now deny, to save you from the wrath to come; but we have our doubts whether he would hear your prayer.—Princeton Tribune.

In sending you the above clipping from the Princeton Tribune concerning my article which you so kindly published, I do so for the purpose of asking you to accord to me the privilege of making some comment upon it, and asking for the space. Before doing so, however, I want to say that I have been hugely interested on the subject of organization and to state that I am in favor of organizing the Freethinkers, first locally, then nationally, but organizing in any way that is calculated to extend a helping hand to suffering humanity.

The article enclosed, might well be considered beneath my notice. It is undeserving the dignity of an answer. It is not argument, it is only clap-trap and balderdash. It is the cheapest of its kind. After reading his attacks upon me in his own paper, and knowing that he had denied me access to the same columns, an intelligent person is bound to realize that I have struck him and he is down and out. Upon the principle of justice and equity I was entitled to speak but he held the bit in his teeth and balked on me. He denied me even the right of self-defense, which the law guarantees to even a murderer.

My purpose in writing this article to you now is to get the people of this community to read it, especially those who have read the Tribune and these will understand what I mean when I say that the Tribune sought to make the people, especially its readers, believe me to be a bad man and its editor a good man. Say, Jim, you started this dodge and mark me, you will be sorry for it. You will have to come again, as there are too many people who will read the above and then pass judgment upon you for what kind of a man you really are. It is the gun that don't look to be loaded that hurts most, and it is just such 22 short, would-be editors as you and your business friend, who are the main causes of the approaching conduct in America.

The Socialist and the Atheist knows and contends that no question is settled until it has been settled right. Once we can obtain a Socialist form of government, then will the whisky question, religion, preachers, bible and wars and grafts, all be settled and settled right. There will then be no disputes between labor and capital and no political bosses. Men and women will realize the full value of their ego, their individuality.

As regards my being a candidate for Congress, let me say that I am sure of

getting two votes, my own and another Socialist in the district. These are all I know of now, but watch the Socialist vote after Haywood is elected Gov. ernor of Colorado.

No doubt you believe I am bound for hell, but it is because you do not know any better. On the other hand, I would like to see your front seat ticket to Kingdom Come. I would like to see both you and Jack edging up to St. Pe-ta's gate. If he knows you as I do, he would ask you to pass on or to stand aside to make room for Will Daly. But, say Pard, if there is a hell I don't believe there would be room enough for me to get in as it is filled now with dampfool editors and ex-sheriffs.

I realize that this discussion properly belongs in the columns of the Tribune, and unless you reproduce the whole thing, I shall, hereafter, treat you with the contempt you so richly deserve.

CLEANINGS FROM THE HOLY(?)BOOK

As Straws Show Which Way the Wind Bloweth, So the Bible Contains Evidences of its Own Immortality

(By A. LUTTERMAN)

In my distress, I (David) called upon the Lord, and cried to my God, and he did hear my voice out of the temple, and my cry did enter into his ears. Then the earth shook and trembled, the foundations of heavens moved and shook because he was wrath. And there went up a smoke out of his nostrils and fire out of his mouth devoured coals were kindled by it, and the Lord thundered from heaven and the Most High uttered his voice. 2 Sam. (xxii. F-14).

Can any one in this wide world picture out a God that is so abhorrent and ugly, as this Christian God? Let him try his hand. I give it up.

Thus saith the Lord, behold, I will fire up evil against thee out of thine own house and I will take thy wives before thine eyes and give them unto thy neighbors. 2 Sam. (xii. 7).

Suppose the wives would object in the matter, is the women simple trading stock before the Lord?

They shall fall by the sword; their infants shall be dashed to pieces; and their women with child shall be ripped up (Hosea, xiii. 16).

Now honestly, is it fit to use such language in public and thereby elevate the standard of morals? Yet the Christian claims that the Bible is a moral guide. Happy shall he be that maketh and dasheth thy neck once against the stones. (Ps. cxxxvii. 9).

If Christians feel happy by killing innocent babes, can we expect civilization from a Christian standpoint? Their children also shall be dashed in pieces before thine eyes; their houses shall be spoiled and their wives ravished (Isa. xlii. 16).

If the Children of God would act upon such commands, what effect would that have upon our custom?

I will put my hook in their nose and my bridle in their lips. (2 Kings. xix. 28).

Would it not be a good deal better to put a hook in the snout of the Lord God, and bridle his jaws to curb him a little in his red hot wrath?

The Lord hath made all things for himself. Yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. (Prov. xvi. 14).

Does not the Lord God acknowledge in the foregoing that he, himself, is the author of all wickedness? Why then, accuse the poor innocent Devil of all crimes?

Here is a bread recipe from the Lord on High. It may be all right for Christians, but it is strong for me. I will not write it down, for fear it may get stale, I advise all good Christians to take it fresh from the good old Book, the word of God, and try it as recommended by the Lord. You will find a full description of this wonderful compound in Ezek. iv. 11-15.

Then he said unto them: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. (St. Luke xxiv. 25.)"

Does not the above approve of Infidelity, and call all good Christians fools?

These are a few of the many quotations from the Christian Bible that may interest the readers and arouse their curiosity.

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